The source of this file follows:

"Beyond the Grave: The legends and lore of the wight, wraith, and mummy"

By Tom Moldvay — Dragon #198 (October 1993)

New layout by Steve Stewart.

This document is only intended for use by individuals who own Dragon #198.

This monstrous compendium page and others can be found at Zayix's Fälgorna Archives for Dungeons and Dragons (AD&D 2nd edition) at http://www.saintsilver.com/zayix/

Beyond the Grave: The legends and lore of the wight, wraith, and mummy

By Tom Moldvay — Dragon #198 (October 1993)

Wight is a general Germanic word meaning "being" or "creature" Over the years, it increasingly came to be applied to either good or bad spirits, until it came to have a supernatural connotation.

In late Saxon, "unsele wiht" means "uncanny creature." In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer uses the word for dangerous spirits in the phrase, "I crouche thee from elves and from wightes." In "The Miller's Tales," English minister Robert Kirk, in *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* (1691), talks of seeing the fairies crowding in from all quarters "like furious hardie wights."

Wight is not a word objected to by the elves, for in the fairy rhyme given by Robert Chambers in *Popular Rhymes of Scotland:*

> But gin ye ca' me seelie wicht,
> I'll be vour freend baith day and nicht.

A "seelie wicht" would be a good wight, a member of the Seelie Court that rules the good fairies. An elf would make objection to being called an "unseelie wicht," an "evil wight" who pays homage to the Unseelie Court of the evil fairies.

Like most things supernatural, wights, in the course of time, ceased to be viewed as having any good and were seen as strictly evil. Wights became wicked beings that came out of the darkness. As such it was easy to make wights undead creatures. J. R. R. Tolkien used a similar jump of the imagination for the "barrow wight" Frodo runs into in The *Lord of the Rings.*

In TSR's D&D and AD&D games, wraiths are essentially more powerful wights. The derivations of the two words are similar. Wight comes from the AngleSaxon "wiht;" wraith comes from the lowland Scots (i.e, English-speaking) "warth;" which can ultimately be traced back to the Old Norse "vorthr;" from "vartha:" to ward or guard. Both words are part of the larger British category of folklore. Tolkien recognized the affinity between the words when he used "ring-

wraiths" for the horrid beings that ceaselessly hunt for the One Ring.

The word "mummy" is borrowed from the French "mumie;" which in turn is derived from the Arab "mumiya;" which denotes an embalmed body. The word entered the language as a result of Napoleon's 1798 campaign to Egypt, which created a European—indeed, worldwide-craze for the ancient Egyptians. The undead mummies in AD&D games owe much to the legends surrounding Egyptologists, and even more to certain "B" movies. While wights, wraiths, and mummies have different derivations, they share one thing in common: the primitive belief that the body somehow lives on inside the tomb. This belief is most clearly seen in early Egyptian burial beliefs.

Summoning/Controlling undead

The summoning and controlling of certain types of very powerful undead, particularly mummies, is a common theme in literature and movies. The DM may wish. to allow evil (and some neutral) clerics to summon some kinds of special undead from afar then control them. The power would require a special ceremony and would depend on the availability of the

proper kind of undead. Finally, the cleric would have to maintain concentration to control the undead similar to a mage controlling an elemental. It is suggested that the cleric gain the power only when his 1d20 roll to turn the appropriate kind of undead is less than 10.

Some appropriate kinds of undead, and the clerical level at which they could be summoned and controlled, would be: skleros (8), angreden (5), callicantzari (5), skotos (6), mummy (8), lesser colossus (8), vrykolakas (8), vartha (9), ch'ng shih (9), and ka (14).

Monster notes

The monster format used throughout this article, while essentially the same as that of the AD&D 2nd Edition rules, does differ slightly. These changes are used:

1. "TREASURE" lists both a percentage (the old "% IN LAIR" value) and a treasure type letter. For example, "50% A" means there is a 50% chance the monster (if randomly selected) will be in its lair, and it has treasure type A.

2. The subcategory of "Ecology" has been left out since such a category is essentially meaningless when applied to the undead, who contribute nothing to living ecologies.

Bibliography

Briggs, Katherine Mary. *An Encyclopedia of Fairies.* New York; Pantheon Books, 1976.

Hight, George Ainslie, translator. *Saga of Grettir the Strong*. New York: E. P. Dutton &.Co., 1913.

Simpson, Jacqualine, translator. *The Northmen Talk: A Choice of Tales from Iceland.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.

Spencer, A. J. *Death in Ancient Egypt.* New York: Penguin Books, 1982.